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*The Columbia Guide to  
Central African Literature in English  
Since 1945*

Adrian Roscoe

with Contributions by Anthony Chennells



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*For those suffering misfortune  
and those urgently portraying it*

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## Preface

This book reflects the growth of written literature in English since 1945 in the three Central African nations of Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Zambia, countries that share a common history as former British colonies. (Vernacular texts arising from the region's ancient oral traditions do not fall within the guide's compass.) The suggested baseline date of 1945 would be significant for an examination of modern literature from most parts of Africa. In the case of Central Africa, the end of World War II brought both imperial fatigue and broken British promises about freedom, which in turn revived liberation energies and ultimately produced both independence and a major upsurge in literary production.

Freedom arrived in the 1960s for Malawi and Zambia, but not until 1980 for Zimbabwe, and then only after a bloody war provoked by white settlers unable, or unwilling, to foresee the growing demand for freedom on the part of subjugated blacks. Central African literature from this period thus reflects colonial and postcolonial experience and in its responses naturally shares commonalities with writing across the continent. The introductory sections, therefore, and individual author entries, carry cross-continental allusion whenever literary and historical linkage seems illuminating. Because Central Africa, unlike, say, West Africa, was a site of classic settler colonialism, comparisons with such settler territories as Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa will arise most naturally. On the other hand, since a phenomenon like postcolonial disenchantment overleaps the boundaries of colonial taxonomy, allusion to this might reach in any direction across the continent. A related point is that, where comment on African writing once emphasized the West's shaping influence (Senegalese debts to Chateaubriand or Malawian echoes of Eliot), the connecting lines of fertilization are now distinctly African. A Zambian writer might reflect the influence of Uganda's Okot p'Bitek, a Zimbabwean writer the influence of South Africa's Es'kia Mphahlele.

A distinguishing feature of the *Columbia Guide to Central African Literature in English Since 1945* is its introductory focus on colonialism itself—its nature, origins, and varieties. This should need no apology. To investigate African literature without reference to colonialism would resemble, say, studying African Americans without allusion to slavery, or considering the Middle East without mention of the Ottomans. For Central Africa, then, this means not just colonialism but, precisely, British colonialism. This book asks—even if cannot clearly answer—what were British colonialism's motivating energies, how it could be legitimized, and how it differed from rival brands. Did it begin, as all modern projects and proposals must, with a neat statement of “aims and objectives” and bureaucratic confusion over how these terms might differ? Was there an identity of colonial impact, immediate and long-term, on all three Central African territories? And what characteristics is the new writing manifesting as colonialism recedes into history?

Central Africa has also produced a settlers' literature. With considerable success (witness Doris Lessing and Wilbur Smith) the white community, repeating Canadian,

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